

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



April / May 2013

Xplor

adventures in nature

THE SWEET
SHELL OF SUCCESS

TURTLES DON'T NEED SPEED TO SURVIVE

COMMENTS



Crappie

ON THE COVER



THREE-TOED
BOX TURTLE

6 The Sweet Shell of Success

Missouri's turtles take life slowly in stride.

10 Fishing with Grandpa Charlie

Learn how to catch a tasty fish with a funny name.

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Hercules beetle



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WHAT IS IT?

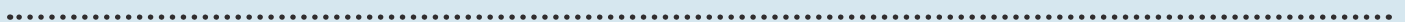
DON'T KNOW?

Jump to Page 17 to find out.



- ❶ I wear my best bling in the spring.
- ❷ To charm the chicks, I strut my stuff.

- ❸ I have spurs, but I'm no cowboy.
- ❹ My gobble makes hearts wobble.



WOW discover

Make MOTH MASH

Want a good look at some fluttering phantoms of the night? Then mix up some moth mash. Take an overripe banana — the browner, the better — put it in a bowl, and squish it into goo. Stir in a cup of apple juice and half a cup of honey. Use a paintbrush to slop the mixture onto tree trunks in your yard. After sundown, put on a headlamp and head outside to see what flutters in to munch the mash.



April and May are Goldilocks months — not too hot nor too cold. Wildflowers pop up, songbirds migrate, and fish finally find their appetites. Here are just a few things to discover.

Show us how YOU Xplor



We know you do some fun things in nature. Next time you're out exploring, snap a photo of your adventure. Ask an adult to submit the picture to the "Kids in Nature Photo Contest" at flickr.com/groups/mdc-kids-in-nature. Each month, the Conservation Department will select a winning photo to display on their website, and all winners will appear in the January 2014 issue of the *Missouri Conservationist*.

Don't miss the chance to Discover Nature at

March through a marsh at **WETLANDS FOR KIDS.**

August A. Busch Memorial Conservation Area, St. Charles
April 6, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
For info, call 636-441-4554.

Get introduced to the **REPTILES IN YOUR BACKYARD.**

Burr Oak Woods Conservation Nature Center, Blue Springs; April 27, 10 to 11:30 a.m. For more info, email burr.oak@mdc.mo.gov.

Watch experts untangle captured bats at **MIST NETTING BATS.**

Emmenegger Nature Park, Kirkwood
April 26, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
Make reservations at 314-301-1500.



Foil Pack Chicken

- 1 chicken breast (cut into 1-inch pieces)
- 1 potato (sliced)
- 1/2 onion (sliced)
- 1/2 bell pepper (sliced)
- 1 garlic clove (sliced)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

Cook on COALS

Cooking over a campfire is yummy and easy. You don't even need a pan — just a few sheets of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Combine the above ingredients, and sandwich the mixture between two sheets of foil. Next, fold the edges of the foil inward to form a packet. Place the packet on red-hot coals for about 40 minutes. Use tongs or sticks to remove the packet, give it time to cool, then peel open the foil and dig in!

Bird's-foot violet



Flowering dogwood

Make an IM-PRESS-IVE Card

April showers bring May flowers — just in time for Mother's Day. Snip a few blooms from your backyard (leave most for nature) and place the flowers between several sheets of newspaper. Stack heavy books on top and leave them there until the flowers dry. Make a card out of construction paper, write a nice note on the inside, and glue the pressed flowers to the front. We're sure your mom will be im-pressed.

Build a wren MANSION

House wrens are tiny birds with huge voices and attitudes. Coax a pair to nest in your yard by making a papier-mâché birdhouse. Cut a newspaper into 1-inch-wide strips. Mix together 2 cups flour, 2 cups water, and 1 tablespoon salt.

Dip each strip in the paste and wipe off extra goop. Layer the strips over a balloon until you have about five layers.

When the paste dries, pop the balloon and have an adult cut a 1 1/8-inch diameter hole in the side. Cover the birdhouse with waterproof paint so your wren mansion won't turn to mush when it rains. Once the paint dries, hang the house from a branch.



SALVAGE STRANDED WORMS

Some people see worms stranded on a sidewalk after a storm and think, "Gross!" Others think, "Let's go fishing!" If you fall into the latter category, gather the stranded wigglers in an empty coffee can, then stuff in some loose, wet leaves. Put the can in a cool, dark place. The refrigerator works well — if it's OK with mom. The worms should keep for several days until you can head to your favorite fishing hole.

Earthworms



these fun events.

Find some tiny peepers at FROGGY FRIDAY NIGHT.

Cape Girardeau
Nature Center
April 5,
5 to 9 p.m.
For information,
call 573-290-5218.



Spring peeper

Bag a gobbler during YOUTH SPRING TURKEY SEASON.

Statewide
April 6–7, 2013
For info, visit
[mdc.mo.gov/
node/4051](http://mdc.mo.gov/node/4051).



Looking for more ways to have fun outside? Find out about Discover Nature programs in your area at xplormo.org/node/2616.

PREDATOR VS. PREY

The struggle to survive isn't always a fair fight. Here's what separates nature's winners from its losers.

Illustration by David Besenger

Camouflage Coat

Sunlight streaming through overhead leaves casts spots of light on the forest floor. A fawn's spotty coat helps the tiny deer disappear against this speckled pattern.

Ticker Toggle

When danger approaches, a fawn's heart slows from 180 beats a minute to about 40, and the fawn's breathing nearly stops. Predators can't hear its heart or see the tiniest twitch of movement.

Fawn

Clever Canine

Coyotes use sharp wits to find prey. They've been seen following circling crows to dead animals and waiting behind digging badgers to snap up escaping rodents.

Coyote

Scent Less

Fawns don't have a strong odor that would attract predators. To keep from soiling fawns with their stronger scents, mama deer visit their babies just a few times a day.

Precision Vision

Although coyotes can't see as many colors as humans, their eyes are excellent at detecting the slightest movement from prey.

Doggone Fast

Coyotes can sprint 40 miles an hour for short distances, which is plenty fast enough to run down a newborn fawn.

AND THE WINNER IS...

This one could go either way. If the fawn lies absolutely still, the coyote should pass right by. But if it tries to run, it will become coyote kibble.

Arbor Day, which Missourians celebrate on the first Friday in April, is about appreciating trees. And why not? Trees clean the air, keep soil from washing into rivers, provide homes to animals, and offer shade to people. What's the best way to celebrate this leafy green holiday? Plant a tree!

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED

- > **Tree seedling** (Order seedlings at mdc.mo.gov/node/4011.)
- > **Spade or shovel**
- > **Bucket of water or a garden hose**
- > **Several handfuls of mulch**

HERE'S WHAT YOU DO



- 1 Plant your seedling as soon as possible. If you can't plant it right away, store it in a cool, shady place and keep its roots moist.
- 2 Choose a planting site that gives your seedling room to grow. Remember: Baby trees get bigger. Some, such as oaks, get much bigger. To learn how big your tree will grow, visit mdc.mo.gov/node/5951.
- 3 Dig a hole the same depth as the seedling's roots and about a foot wide. Keep your seedling in its wrapper until you're done digging. You don't want its roots to dry out!
- 4 Place your seedling in the hole. Make sure its roots are spread out and not bent.
- 5 Crumble soil around the roots and pack the soil firmly with your hands.
- 6 Give your seedling lots of water. This will firm up the soil.
- 7 Spread mulch around your seedling, making sure the mulch doesn't touch the trunk. Water your baby tree once a week unless nature gives it a good drink of rain.

How TO

Plant a Tree

Common
SNAPPING TURTLE

THE SWEET SHELL OF SUCCESS

Noppadol Paothong

Common snapping turtles have a bite nine times stronger than a human's bite and almost twice as strong as a great white shark's. Contrary to popular belief, snapping turtles can't bite a broomstick in half.

Earth's first turtle poked its head from its shell when dinosaurs still thundered throughout the land. Dinosaurs have since disappeared, but turtles have remained remarkably unchanged, thanks to one *turtle-riffic* adaptation: their shells.

As a baby turtle grows inside an egg, the tiny turtle's ribs and other bones fuse to form a shell. Although this built-in armor in-*shell*-lates the turtle's squishy body from sharp jaws and claws, the shell comes with a price. To illustrate, lie flat on your tummy, stretch your arms straight out, and spread your legs as wide as you can. Now try to crawl. This is the way turtles must move because their shells force their legs to stick out at crazy angles, and it explains why turtles move so S-L-O-W-L-Y.

But speed isn't everything. Through the ages, turtles have survived the crash of meteorites, the drift of continents, the birth of islands, the rise of mountains, and the comings and goings of ice ages. They've outlasted countless creatures, large and small, and taken hard times slowly in stride. So the next time you see a turtle, take a big whiff. What's that odor? It's the sweet *shell* of success.

OUACHITA MAP TURTLE



Jeff Briggler

Some turtles, such as this Ouachita map turtle, can sleep underwater during winter by absorbing oxygen through a part of their bodies scientists call the cloaca (*cloe-ay-kuh*). Most people have another name for this body part: rear end.

Alligator snapping turtles are the world's largest freshwater turtles. The largest snapper on record weighed 316 pounds.

When an alligator snapping turtle gets hungry, it simply opens its mouth and wiggles its pink, worm-shaped tongue. Hungry fish are lured in for an easy meal and learn too late where the name "snapper" comes from.



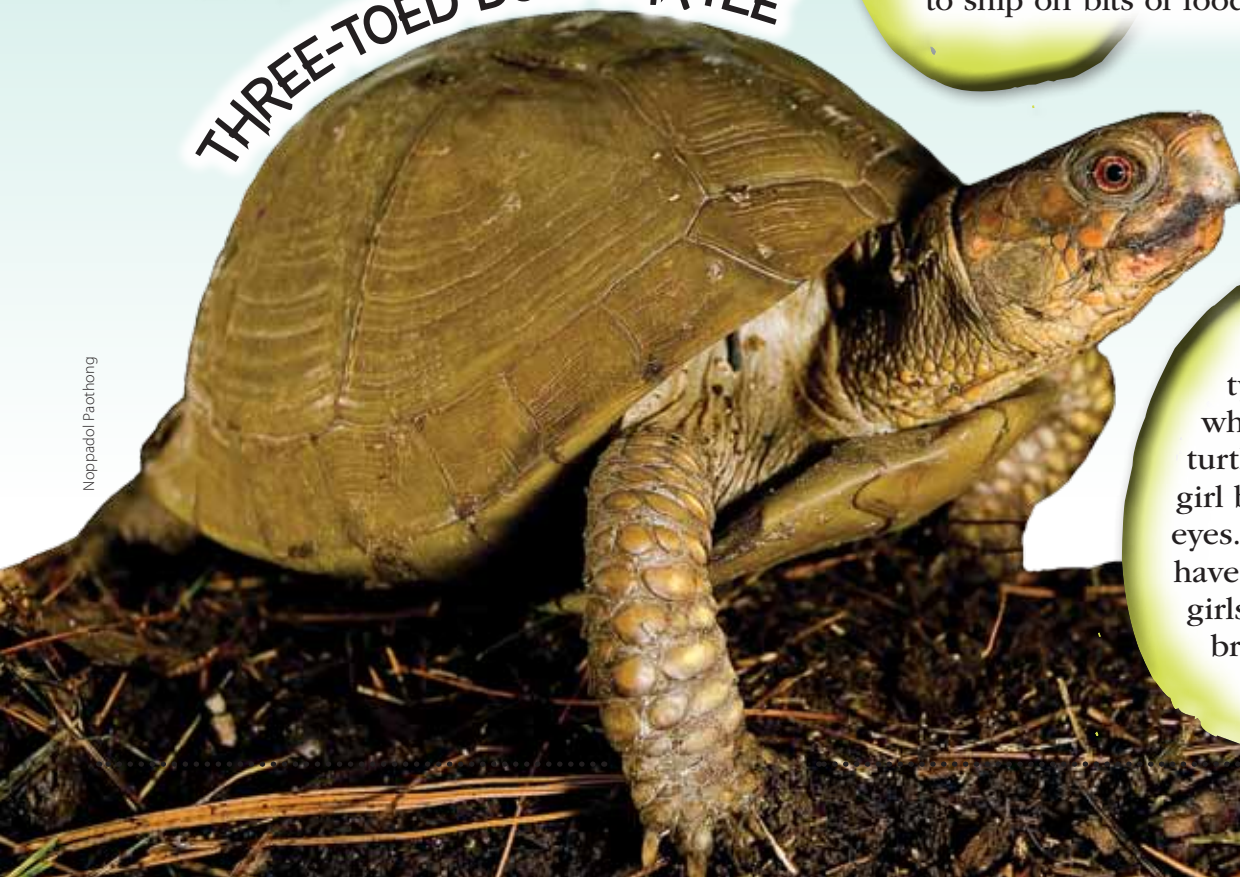
ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE



All turtles lay eggs. In some species, temperature determines whether baby turtles will hatch as boys or girls. Snapping turtle eggs kept at 75 degrees hatch as mostly males. Eggs kept below 70 or above 80 hatch as mostly females.

Turtles are the only toothless reptiles. Instead of chompers, turtles have a **sharp beak**. Their lower jaw fits tightly inside their upper jaw, allowing turtles to use their beaks like scissors to snip off bits of food.

THREE-TOED BOX TURTLE



HE'S A BOY.

You can typically tell whether a box turtle is a boy or a girl by the color of its eyes. Boys generally have reddish eyes; girls typically have brownish-yellow eyes.

SOFTSHELL TURTLE



Jim Merill/Visuals Unlimited, Inc.

Softshell turtles bury themselves in sand and leave just their snorkel-like snout sticking out. When a fish swims by . . . Chomp!

Softshell turtles don't have a hard shell like other Missouri turtles. Their shells feel like wet leather. But don't try to feel one for yourself. Softshells have cranky attitudes, long necks, and sharp beaks — and they aren't afraid to bite.

When basking, as these red-eared sliders are doing, many turtles stretch out their legs and toes to absorb as much sunshine as possible. This raises the turtle's body temperature and helps the turtle produce vitamin D.



RED-EARED SLIDERS



RED-EARED SLIDERS



BOY



GIRL

Unlike humans, with many kinds of turtles, it's the boys who let their fingernails grow long. When they're trying to charm a mate, males swim in front of females and wave their long claws in the females' faces.

THEY ONLY GROW TO BE 4 INCHES LONG.



© Mariusz Jurgielewicz | Dreamstime.com

Missouri's smallest turtle is also its stinkiest. Common musk turtles — also called stinkpots — rarely grow larger than your palm and release a funky-smelling fluid when bothered.



COMMON MUSK TURTLE

© Amwu | Dreamstime.com

Some people think softshell and common snapping turtles are tasty. But not all turtles are OK to eat. There are laws against harming alligator snapping turtles, and you should never eat box turtles. Box turtles sometimes eat poisonous mushrooms, and the toxins can linger in the turtle's flesh.

These fun facts barely scratch the shell. For more on Missouri's turtles, crawl over to mdc.mo.gov/node/7005.



Fishing with Grandpa Charlie

Eryn and Lauren love to go fishing with their Grandpa Charlie. Tag along as they try to catch a tasty fish with a funny name — crappie.

by Matt Seek • photos by Cliff White

Off to an Early Start

Grandpa Charlie says crappie (*crop-ee*) are hungriest early in the morning and late in the evening. We show up at his house just after sunrise. You don't need tons of gear to catch crappie. We bring lightweight rods and spinning reels, plastic jigs and live minnows for bait, hats, sunscreen, life jackets, water, and snacks. We don't need fishing licenses because we're younger than 16. Grandpa

has to have one, though. It takes just a few minutes to stow everything in Grandpa's pickup, then we're on our way.





Crappie are light biters. Use a rod that bends easily so you can feel a crappie's dainty nibble. Load your reel with clear, skinny fishing line. Six- to 8-pound test is best.

Crappie begin nesting when water temperatures reach 55 degrees, which is usually from mid-April to mid-May in Missouri. During this time, look for crappie in water 3 to 10 feet deep, usually in a cove that's protected from wind and waves.

Crappie have little mouths. If you use minnows, make sure they're small: 2 inches or shorter.

A Tasty Fish with a Funny Name

As our boat skims across the lake, Grandpa gives us a quick lesson in crappie biology. He says crappie are skinny, silvery fish that are related to bass, bluegill, and goggle-eye. Crappie eat aquatic insects and small fish such as minnows. Missouri has two kinds of crappie — white and black — but white crappie can live in muddier water and are more common. Both are found in lakes, ponds, and the backwaters of large rivers. Grandpa says that because of conservation, Missouri is a great place to fish.

Finding Fish

According to Grandpa, where you find crappie depends on the time of year you're fishing. In summer, fall, and winter, crappie hang out in deeper water near underwater brush piles,

submerged trees, or under boat docks. In spring, crappie move to shallow water where females lay eggs and males guard nests. It's late April, so we're fishing near the shore. Grandpa says male crappie fiercely defend their nests and strike at anything that comes close — including fishing lures.

Baiting Up

Grandpa helps us tie tiny hooks to our fishing line and squeeze split shot a few inches up the line to help our bait sink quickly. We're using two kinds of bait: live minnows and plastic jigs. Grandpa says feathery marabou jigs work well, too. We hook the minnows through their noses and thread the plastic jigs onto our hooks so they cover everything but the barbs. Grandpa moves the boat quietly close to shore. We cast and let our baits sink into the cold, clear water.



Fishing Tips

Crappie are friendly fish — they travel, feed, and nest in schools. If you find one, keep fishing at the same spot. You'll find others nearby.

When you feel a nibble, don't set the hook too hard. Crappie are nicknamed "paper mouths" for a reason. It helps to set the drag on your reel so that line pulls out easily.

To measure a fish correctly, be sure to squeeze the lobes of the fish's tail together. For more fishing rules, visit the Conservation Department's website at mdc.mo.gov/node/3104.

Crappie Techniques

If you're fishing deeper water near a brush pile or dock, Grandpa says to drop your bait straight down into the brush, raise the tip of your rod a foot or two, then let your bait sink again. Be ready. Crappie often strike while the bait is sinking. If you're fishing shallow water, cast your bait toward shore, let it sink, and reel it in slowly. Let the bait bounce over limbs and rocks, and be ready for a strike at any time.

Hitting the Honey Hole

In no time, we're pulling fish after fish into our boat. We lay each on a ruler and measure from the fish's snout to the tip of its tail. The lake we're on has a 9-inch minimum length limit. This means we must release as quickly and gently as possible any fish less than 9 inches long. Grandpa says this lets

little fish grow into big fish and helps make sure there are lots of adult fish to lay eggs each year.

On a Slow Boat Home

Even though we have to toss a few fish back, it doesn't take long for each of us to catch our limit of 15 crappie. We stow our gear, and motor slowly home. Just before we reach the boat ramp, Grandpa pulls into a secluded cove and pulls out his guitar. Sunshine glimmers off its silver strings, reminding us of the silver fish on our stringers. Grandpa's hand glides gracefully up and down the frets, and a bluegrass tune rings off the calm water. My sister and I listen, both of us thinking the same thought: This is the perfect end to a perfect day of fishing with Grandpa Charlie.

WILD JOBS

HATCHERY MANAGER BRUCE DRECKTRAH
BABYSITS BABY PADDLEFISH.

Michelle
Dalbey

Q: WHAT DOES A PADDLEFISH BABYSITTER DO?

A: I work at Blind Pony Hatchery near Sweet Springs. Part of my job is gathering paddlefish eggs and helping them hatch.

Q: WHAT'S A PADDLEFISH?

A: Paddlefish have been around for about 300 million years. They don't have teeth or bones. And they get really big — some weigh more than 100 pounds! But their most amazing feature is their long, paddle-shaped snout.

Q: HOW DO YOU GATHER THEIR EGGS?

A: When females are ready to lay, we lift them out of the water and catch the eggs in a pan. Paddlefish are heavy, so another hatchery worker helps me lift them. Luckily, paddlefish have a built-in handle.

Q: WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE EGGS?

A: We add a few more ingredients and stir the mixture with a turkey feather. Paddlefish eggs are delicate. If we stirred with anything else, we'd scramble the eggs.

Q: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE THE EGGS TO HATCH?

A: About a week. The baby paddlefish live in an aquarium for a few days, then we move them outside to ponds. When they're big enough to fend for themselves, we turn them loose in Truman Lake, Table Rock Lake, and Lake of the Ozarks.

Q: WHY NOT LET PADDLEFISH LAY EGGS IN THE WILD?

A: Dam building and river dredging has destroyed many places where paddlefish lay eggs. Without hatcheries, paddlefish would disappear from many of Missouri's waters.

STRANGE, but TRUE!

YOUR GUIDE TO ALL THE
UNUSUAL, UNIQUE,
AND **UNBELIEVABLE**
STUFF THAT GOES ON IN NATURE

HERCULES BEETLES

make human weight lifters look like wimps. The brawny bugs can push press 850 times their weight. To do the same, an Olympian would need to lift more than 150,000 pounds!



COMMON NIGHTHAWKS

have a comb on their middle toenail. Biologists suspect the birds use it to groom their feathers, though no one is sure how they reach their heads with their stubby, little legs.

Feathers in a flash: Six days after hatching, **YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO** chicks go from basically bare to fully feathered in about two hours. Three days later, they take flight.



Beware of flying fish.

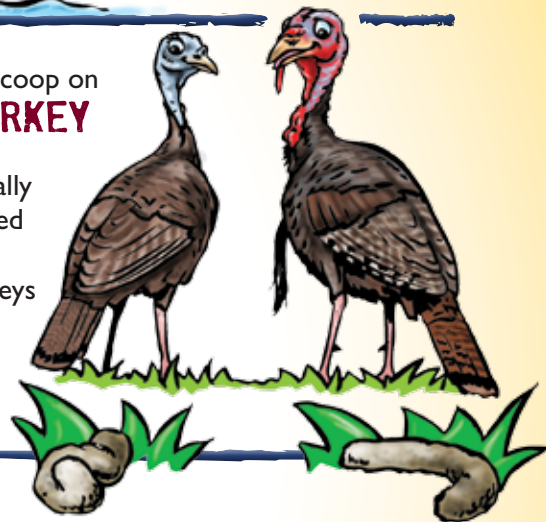
SILVER CARP

can leap 10 feet out of the water when startled.

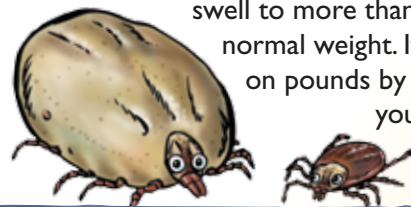
The heavy fish, which are native to Asia but have invaded Missouri's rivers, can injure anglers and knock people out of boats.

Here's the scoop on WILD TURKEY

poop: Male turkeys usually leave J-shaped droppings. Female turkeys leave spiral-shaped droppings.

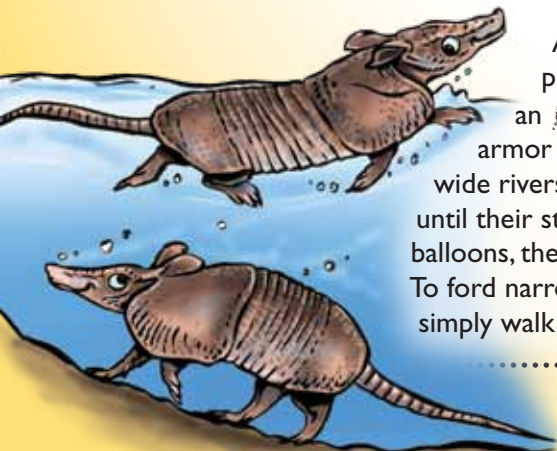


Sucking blood makes a **DOG TICK** feel, well, swell. Female ticks suck enough blood to swell to more than 100 times their normal weight. If you packed on pounds by the same factor, you'd weigh more than a minivan!



MEADOW JUMPING MICE

are the kings of spring. When startled, the gerbil-sized rodents can leap 12 feet in a single bound. If you had the same spring in your step, you wouldn't have problems jumping over two school buses parked end to end.



Although perfect for predator protection, an **ARMADILLO'S** armor is heavy. To cross wide rivers, armadillos gulp air until their stomachs blow up like balloons, then they float across. To ford narrow streams, they simply walk along the bottom.

XPLOR MOR

Turkey TROUBLES

You've earned your hunter education certificate, driven your sister crazy by practicing turkey calling, and peppered dozens of targets with shotgun pellets. Now you're sitting in the woods with your back against a cottonwood, hoping to bag a turkey. **Gobble, gobble. Go to 1.**

1 Just before sunrise, a thunderous gobble breaks the silence. In the twilight, you spy the outline of a turkey in a nearby oak. It's high in the tree but within range. You shoulder your shotgun. What next? **Click off the safety and squeeze the trigger. Go to 4. Wait and see what happens. Go to 2.**

2 The turkey lets loose another gobble then flies across the creek into the woods. What now? **Follow that bird! Go to 3. Try to call the turkey back. Go to 8.**

3 You unload your gun and pull on a hunter-orange vest. While searching for a way across the creek, you stumble into a giant patch of morel mushrooms. You think: **Turkey? What turkey? I've hit the jackpot! Go to 6. Fungus, schmungus. I'm after gobblers. Go to 5.**

4 Hold up, cowboy. First, most hunters think it's unsporting to shoot a turkey out of a tree. Second, only bearded turkeys are legal to shoot. Who's to say if that turkey had a beard? You only saw its outline. You'd better go home and study hunting regulations. **The End**

5 You trail the gobble across the creek. Suddenly, someone yells: "Hey, I'm hunting here!" You spin to see a camouflaged man. "Good thing you're wearing orange," he says. "At first, I thought you were a turkey." You apologize and tell the hunter where you're headed. You find a wide tree and sit against it. It's a long shot, but maybe you can call that gobble back. **Go to 8.**

8 Using your trusty turkey call, you send what you hope sounds like a hen turkey's lovesick yelp into the morning air. **Go to 11.**

9 Something moves behind a briar patch. It looks like a turkey, but you aren't 100 percent sure. Whatever it is, it's moving farther away. You think: **I better shoot while I can. Go to 12. I better wait. Go to 13.**

6 You cram mushroom after beautiful mushroom into your backpack. Somewhere upstream an owl hoots, and instantly a turkey gobbles back. Maybe you should get back to turkey hunting. **Go to 8.**

7 Gobble, gobble, gobble! You think: That's the strangest alarm I've ever heard. Then your eyes snap open. **Go to 13.**

10 The turkey is still strutting when a mosquito bites your nose. The itch instantly turns unbearable. You're not sure how much you can take. **Scratch that itch. Go to 16. Don't move a muscle. Go to 15.**



11

The gobbler won't budge. You call. He gobbles. Time passes. Your eyelids grow heavy. Wow, you sure got up early. **A little nappy-nap won't hurt. Go to 7. Must. Stay. Awake. Go to 9.**

13 Seconds later, a huge gobbler walks into view. He fans his tail and begins strutting as if on parade. Unfortunately, your shotgun is in your lap. You: **Snap up the gun and try to get off a shot. Go to 16. Wait and see what happens. Go to 10.**

14 Blam! Your gun fires, and the turkey ducks. Pellets hurtle over the gobbler's head. He doesn't wait for you to take another shot. As he tears off into the woods, you think, better luck tomorrow. **The End**

15 The turkey walks behind a tree, and you snap the shotgun to your shoulder. Minutes tick by. Then the gobbler wanders closer. You see his beard. You look behind him. There's nothing in the line of fire. It's now or never. You click off the gun's safety and aim: **For the gobbler's beak. Go to 14. For the spot where the turkey's head meets its feathers. Go to 17.**

16 Before you can blink, you're staring at the southbound end of a northbound turkey. Rats. Dad always said turkeys were fast. He also said sometimes you have to learn the hard way. You guess you just did. **The End**

12 As you lift your gun, a camouflaged hunter emerges from the briars. He yells, "Don't shoot!" Your hunter-education instructor said over and over to be absolutely sure what you're shooting at. You just came chillingly close to learning why. Your hands won't quit shaking. You no longer feel like hunting. **The End**

17 Blam! Your gun fires, and the gobbler drops like a bag of hammers. Great shot. Getting a turkey takes a lot of skill and a little luck. Today, you seemed to have both. **The End**

ANSWER TO WHAT IS? FROM PAGE 1

Male turkeys go to a lot of trouble to impress females. During mating season, which runs from March to May, males grow flashy feathers, gobble, and strut around with their tails fanned out. But their charm attacks don't stop with the chicks. Rival males sometimes attack each other, using sharp spurs on the backs of their legs as weapons.



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FREE TO MISSOURI HOUSEHOLDS

CRITTER CORNER

Sedge Wren



He's no dummy. Each male sedge wren builds, on average, seven ball-shaped nests in wet, grassy habitats. Yet, he uses only one to raise his family. Biologists aren't sure why wrens build so many "dummy nests," but the extra digs may help confuse predators. If a hungry snake or raccoon searches several nests and doesn't score any eggs, it might give up and hunt elsewhere.